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Can you Design for Fidelity? – How your Intervention Framework describe Intended Actions, Participation and Behavior

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Statement of problem

In recent years the term fidelity has been introduced within the field of organizational level interventions. Fidelity describes the extent to which the intervention has been implemented as it was originally intended, and is regarded critical for determining the validity of the research results. The reason for introducing this term has been for researchers to be able to conclude whether an intervention has worked as intended. In this paper we discuss the term fidelity in relation to the concept of script analysis (Akrich 1994). We do this to question whether it is even relevant to discuss fidelity in organizational level interventions. The concept of fidelity stems from clinical interventions although the concept has developed over time (Bellg et al. 2004). Organizational level interventions differ from clinical interventions, as they are more complex regarding both the “dose” given and the number and levels of participants involved at the same time. Steering organizational level interventions in every detail and secure full fidelity or treatment integrity can thus seem difficult.

Organizational level intervention frameworks are often built on the designer’s experiences with previous interventions as well as what have been reported as best practice. The designer thus has a large role in making the intervention work – he or she can design intended actions, participation and behavior into the framework.

The notion script can help explain the designer’s role. A script is the designer’s presumptions, visions and predictions about how the framework will interact with the intervention participants. As derived concepts Akrich (1994) introduces ‘in-scription’ and ‘de-scription’. Where ‘in-scription’ is the limitations and constraint that the intervention designer in-scribe in the framework, and ‘de-scription’ is how the intervention participants interpret the framework and adjust the framework to the organization.

Procedures

We use the results from the PoWRS (Prevention of Work Related Stress) program intervention, when it was tested in four Danish small and medium sized enterprises. The results from the intervention is documented in Ipsen et al (2014). The overall research approach was a qualitative case study approach. The key components in the program were: employee participation, management support, and that changes should be implemented into the daily activities.

Results and analysis

When looking at how the four companies implemented the program, we saw that three of the companies managed to get the employees involved and get management’s support, but it differed how the companies did it in practice.

It was a general tendency in all four companies that the in-house facilitators initiated the intervention activities and were in charge of running them. But how they planned the activities and involved their colleagues differed across the companies. E.g. in one company the facilitators involved their colleagues in painting some wooden brick they needed for the visualization system to monitor the intervention progress. In the other companies the facilitators made the system them self. All four companies had out spoken management support, although at different organizational levels. Management support was emphasized in the PoWRS program, but not whether the support should be from the top management, a middle manager or the first line manager. The results showed that it was not sufficient to get support from top

management, the first line manager also needed to support the process in order for the intervention to succeed.

The PoWRS program also prescribed that the intervention activities should be integrated into daily activities. One company never succeeded in integrating the intervention activities into the daily activities. The company had Lean Board meetings every morning, but they did not consider these meetings a possible activity to address intervention activities even though they were related to the subjects from the lean meetings. The other companies did to a higher degree figure out how to incorporate the changes into the everyday activities.

Our results suggest that it is difficult to create an organizational intervention, without any flexibility due to the complexity of the organizations, where many other agendas operate at the same time as the intervention.

Conclusions

This paper questions whether the term fidelity is relevant in organizational level interventions, due to the complexity of the organizations, and because it neglects the positive impact that small adjustments and improvisation can have on the intervention outcome creating more sustainable organizations.

The concept of scripts is useful to analyze intervention frameworks because it illuminates not only what the intervened companies or change agent did “right” or “wrong”, but also help us shed light on the “attributes” of the intervention framework itself and the designers’ intentions. Implementing an intervention in an organization is a co-creating process between the intervention designers and the intervened organizational actors, although much discussion about intervention fidelity seems to be about how well the organization adheres to the framework, and not so much about how “well” the framework has been designed. And it seems that the more complex an intervention is the harder it is to reach fidelity.

Akrich, Madeleine. 1994. “The De-Description of Technical Objects.” Pp. 205–24 in *Shaping Technology/Building society: studies in socio-technical change*, edited by Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law.

Bellg, Albert J. et al. 2004. “Enhancing Treatment Fidelity in Health Behaviour Change Studies: Best Practices and Recommendations From the NIH Behaviour Change Consortium.” *Health Psychology* 23(5):443–51.

Ipsen, Christine, Liv Gish, and Signe Poulsen. 2014. “Organizational-Level Interventions in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Enabling and Inhibiting Factors in the PoWRS Program.” *Safety Science*. Retrieved August 29, 2014 (<http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0925753514001763>).

Summary (3-4 sentences):

The abstract discusses the concepts of implementation fidelity and script in relation to a organization level intervention study. The results from the intervention study show that the intervention companies uses flexibility to make small adjustments to the intervention program. Implementation of an intervention can be considered to be a co-creating process, which does not correspond well to fidelity where focus is on how well the organization adheres to the intervention program.

Learning objectives (2-6):

After attending the presentation you should be able to:

- Understand the problems associated with using implementation fidelity in organization level interventions
- Identify how intervention participants develop the intervention program to make it fit to the organization

Themes or questions addressed in presentation:

- Is it relevant to use implementation fidelity in organization level intervention studies?